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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [ASEC](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: S/CT DEPUTY COORDINATOR PALMER VISITS MOROCCO

Classified by DCM Wayne Bush for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: During a May 8-10 visit, S/CT Deputy Coordinator Virginia Palmer and senior Moroccan officials discussed the GOM's holistic approach to combating terrorism and countering extremist ideology as well as ways to enhance CT efforts. The Moroccans welcomed Palmer's visit in the context of continued strong bilateral CT cooperation with the United States. Among the specific ideas discussed for expanded cooperation were potential "brainstorming" sessions on TSCTP activities and increased collaboration with Morocco's Ministry of Interior to expand the GOM's border control capabilities. The Mission's CT Working Group briefed Palmer on an ATA program activity that will provide Morocco with K-9 bomb detection capabilities and a proposal for a new project to include a \$249K package of equipment that would lay the foundation for a modern bomb response unit for the police. End summary.

A Holistic Approach

12. (C) Ambassador Yousef Amrani, Director-General of Bilateral Affairs at the Moroccan MFA, received S/CT Deputy Coordinator Virginia Palmer, CT officer Patrick Worman, and Deputy Polcous in his office on the morning of May 8. "Fighting terrorism is no longer an issue for intelligence agencies only," Amrani asserted. In tandem with operations identifying and dismantling specific terrorist cells, the GOM is pursuing the struggle against terrorism on three fronts: First, through advancing political reform and respect for human rights; second, through economic development programs targeting marginalized youth; and third, through religious education programs led by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs to "confront the culture of hate.... Our main battlefield is ideological." A settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and an end to the fighting in Iraq, are essential to stabilizing the entire Middle East and North Africa region, Amrani underscored. Amrani suggested that the emergence of AQIM was due primarily to Government of Algeria "failures." Palmer replied that in some senses the GSPC was forced to associate with AQIM because of the GOA's success in marginalizing it within Algeria.

13. (C) Amrani said "Salafiya Jihadiya" (the GOM's catch-all term for violent jihadists) is made up of numerous small (and mainly autonomous) cells in Morocco. They are driven by ideology to carry out or prepare to carry out suicide attacks in the country and have become a key threat. Marginalized youth are especially vulnerable to infection from this strain of thought, he added. Asked about possible Saudi connections to the spread of Jihadist ideology in Morocco, Amrani observed that the Saudis are suffering as much as any other country from this ideology, yet they remain largely in denial that much of this thought is propagated from within their own borders. He conceded that the GOM has never raised the

problem of extremist ideology with the SAG: "They will never accept this," he asserted.

CT at the Regional Level

¶4. (C) Confirming his general familiarity with the U.S. Trans Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership concept, Amrani said Morocco shared the U.S. concerns that remote, ungoverned regions of the Sahara/Sahel region were already being exploited as safehavens by extremist groups such as the GSPC.

"The corridor between Sudan and Mauritania is especially vulnerable," Amrani observed. He proposed that senior U.S. and Moroccan officials meet for a "brainstorming session" on ways the U.S. and states of the region can work together to combat this threat.

¶5. (S/NF) At a meeting at Morocco's foreign intelligence agency, the DGED (The Directorate Generale des Etudes et Documentation), senior officers gave Palmer an extremely candid overview assessment of the terror threat inside Morocco and in the broader region, outlining AQIM leadership in eight regions within Algeria and a ninth "Trans Sahelian" cell. They noted the convergence of smuggling, crime and terrorist networks in the Saharan border regions and characterized Moukhtar BelMoukhtar as primarily a logistician. They opined that BelMoukhtar was not planning attacks against Mali because that was his base of operations. Noting that AQIM aimed to create "a sense of tension in the Saharan region, building on instability in the Ivory Coast and elsewhere." DGED officials downplayed potential schisms between residual GSPC elements and AQIM. Technical cooperation and information exchange with the U.S. is one of

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the pillars of Morocco's CT program, they emphasized.

Extent of Domestic Threat Still Unknown

¶6. (S/NF) DGED officers asserted that the second cell they wrapped up after the April 15 attack had no ties to Senior Al Qaida leadership. They were candid about their lack of understanding about what had motivated the brother of the first suicide bombing to also participate in suicide attack. The government had not asked the parents of the bombers to speak out against those that lured their sons to suicide, because of "Moroccan respect for families," they said.

¶7. (C) In a separate meeting May 9, the head of the Moroccan Institute for Strategic Studies and a social scientist from Mohammed V University noted that many of those involved in the cells recently discovered had been detained after the 2005 Casablanca bombings. Based on detailed case histories (but not detainee interviews), both professors noted links between "violations" including rape that the men had endured while in detention.

Borders are a Front Line for CT

¶8. (C) Khalid Zerouali, the senior Ministry of Interior official in charge of the country's border security regime, discussed with Palmer the links between illegal migration, narcotics smuggling, and terrorist activity. All three categories exploit the same weaknesses to evade government authority, and measures taken against one will benefit the fight against the other two. All transcend national boundaries and require efficient regional coordination to counter them effectively. Zerouali boasted that the GOM had achieved a 40 percent reduction in domestic cannabis production in 2006. He bristled at reported USG statements citing Algeria as a model for CT efforts in North Africa.

Morocco is much more stable and secure he asserted, whereas
"I cannot travel from Algiers to Oran without fear."

¶9. (C) Zerouali said that although Morocco is not in the African Union, the Moroccan MOI provided technical assistance to police and security forces in various African states including "thousands of scholarships" for Africans to Moroccan Police Academies and civil defense institutes. A graduate of the University of Texas, Zerouali said he had led several MOI delegations to the U.S. in recent years to make contacts and gather ideas for reinventing Morocco's border control system. He said they had particularly benefited from interactions with the U.S. border patrol and had adapted their handbook for use in Morocco. Palmer encouraged Zerouali to work with the U.S. Embassy in Rabat to identify opportunities for more U.S. training and technical assistance for the MOI. Zerouali pledged he would do so.

ATA Activities

¶10. (C) The U.S. Mission's CT Working Group (RSO, LEGAT, RAO, DAO, ODC and POL) briefed Palmer on the overall threat environment and the positive and collaborative relationship the U.S. enjoys with the GOM on CT issues. Among the specific assistance activities noted was a project underway and funded by the Anti-Terrorism Assistance program which will provide the national police (DGSN) with advanced K-9 bomb detection capabilities.

¶11. (C) LEGAT and ARSO described the poor state of Moroccan DGSN bomb investigation units. LEGAT is circulating a list of equipment prepared by the FBI Laboratory which includes protective suits, explosive detection devices, and a robot, that would form the basis for a state of the art bomb response and disposal unit for the police (the DGSN). The package, valued at approximately \$249K, is badly needed by poorly equipped Moroccan explosives technicians and is based on an assessment by an FBI bomb expert. Follow on training for personnel would be a desirable compliment to the equipment. The K-9 program is already funded and will begin to bear fruit later this summer. Funding for the bomb response unit package has not yet been identified.

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